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# Books of The Times

By Bernard Gwertzman

**ALL FALL DOWN: America's Tragic Encounter With Iran.** By Gary Sick. 366 pages. Random House. \$19.95.

**AMERICAN HOSTAGES IN IRAN: The Conduct of a Crisis.** By Warren Christopher, Harold H. Saunders, Gary Sick, Robert Carswell, Richard J. Davis, John E. Hoffman Jr., Roberts B. Owen, Oscar Schachter and Abraham A. Ribicoff. 443 pages. A Council on Foreign Relations Book. Yale University Press. \$25.

**I**T is now more than six years since the Shah of Iran fell, and four years since the American hostage crisis ended. These dual crises were exhausting for the public and for the Administration of President Jimmy Carter.

To the significant literature on Iran already published in recent years, two more excellent books have been added. Of the two, Gary Sick's narrative about American relations with Iran, "All Fall Down," is the more comprehensive, since it covers in detail not only the hostage crisis but also the desperate flailing around in Washington and Teheran in the closing months of 1978 as the Shah's power began discernibly to slip.

Mr. Sick, a Navy captain who was the Iran expert on the National Security Council, has written a taut, dramatic account of the crises that began with the fall of the Shah. His narrative moves easily through the debate over whether the Shah should be admitted to the United States. It covers the seizure of the American Embassy on Nov. 4, 1979, and concludes with the negotiations that finally led to the hostages' release on President Reagan's Inauguration Day.

Because of the frustrations in dealing with Iran in 1978-80, the normal differences within Government were strained to breaking points. Mr. Carter, despite his interest in foreign affairs, could not seem to steer a straight course. His policies fluctuated between the "hard line" of Zbigniew Brzezinski, his national security adviser, and the various approaches put forth by the State Department, led by Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance. Mr. Sick was an intimate adviser and a friend of his boss, Mr. Brzezinski and not surprisingly his judgments on most key issues favor Mr. Brzezinski.

For instance, in "All Fall Down," and in the chapter he contributes to the compendium of articles published by the Council on Foreign Relations, Mr. Sick strongly endorses the failed rescue mission in Iran in April 1980, the move that was advocated by Mr. Brzezinski and finally led Mr. Vance to quit Government in exasperation.

"The rescue mission was a failure," Mr. Sick concludes in "All Fall Down," "but it was a failure of military execution, not of political judgment or command."

"As suggested by the title, this story has no heroes," Mr. Sick writes in his preface. "No one had it right, and the system itself inhibited the flow of accurate information and hampered judgment."

But there are clearly some players, in Mr. Sick's view, who had it less right than others. The most acrimonious debate over Iran in Washington has been whether anything could have been done to prevent the coming to power of the radical, anti-American Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

William H. Sullivan, who was the last Ambassador to Iran, was the first to make public his part of the argument. "Mission to Iran," published in 1981, blamed Mr. Brzezinski for sabotaging efforts that Mr. Sullivan argued might have produced an alternative to the Ayatollah. The former Ambassador also contended that Washington was not paying enough attention to Iran, was not sending him clear instructions and was largely responsible for the collapse. Mr. Sick argues that Mr. Sullivan was undermined, not so much because of policy disagreements, but because he had lost the confidence of the White House by his free-wheeling actions.

The collection of articles in "American Hostages in Iran" is limited to the period of the hostage crisis.

It is an invaluable book for any future historian dealing with the details of the negotiations leading up to the release of the Americans. It includes an exhaustive examination of how the Carter Administration froze billions of dollars in Iranian funds that had been invested in American banks and institutions, how the Administration tried to impose a worldwide trade embargo on the Iranians and how finally the billions in assets were unblocked in exchange for the hostages.

But this uneven book also includes two separate chapters by Harold H. Saunders, who was the senior State Department official involved with Iran throughout the period of the two books, and whose views on the Middle East still command respect now that he is out of government.

Mr. Saunders was close to Mr. Vance, and if Mr. Sick in his book gives a sympathetic portrayal of Mr. Brzezinski's views, Mr. Saunders does the same for Mr. Vance. Mr. Saunders throughout also gives a very human account of the torment felt on a daily basis in Washington by those in the State Department trying to free the hostages, and who believed that patience would prevail.